

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF GUJJARS AND PAHARIS IN RELATION TO CASTE, OCCUPATION AND EDUCATION

**Dr. Javeed Ahmad Bhat,**

*Post-Doctoral Fellow,*

*ICSSR / BBAU Lucknow*

*Visiting Fellow, Ubon University,*

*Thailand*

## ABSTRACT

*In this paper, an attempt has been made to draw comparison between Gujjars and Paharis of Jammu and Kashmir on the basis of Caste, Occupation and Education in order to know the difference in their overall ranking in the social and economic hierarchy. It would also help us to know the socio-economic position of these two communities, simultaneously it was a modest attempt to know, if reservation had really alleviated the backwardness of Gujjars and to what extent the demand of the Paharis for Scheduled Tribe is legitimate and genuine, because socio-economic backwardness of a community or a group is being considered as an important criteria for granting reservation to that particular group. The comparison is based on the lines of the socio-economic status through using an information schedule which includes the items related to identity, social, economic and educational indicators. The study has revealed that both the communities are yet much far away from the purview of progress. The author suggested for some concrete ameliorative action measures that will focus the marginalised within the community.*

**Keywords:** *Backwardness, Nomadic tribes, Schedule tribe, Jammu & Kashmir*

## INTRODUCTION

India is the home to large number of tribal ethnic groups with assorted socio-cultural, economic and geographical backgrounds. The state of Jammu and Kashmir is also inhabited by such communities; the most prominent are the pastoral Gujjars and Paharis. Which are living in the remote, hilly and mountainous areas devoid of the basic necessities of life (Rahi, 2014). To promote and safeguard the educational and economic interests of these weaker sections of the society is one of the basic obligations

of the government. To alleviate the sufferings, the border regions were declared 'Bad Pocket Areas' and the benefits of the schemes were equally shared by all the sections of the people in respect of reservation for recruitments, border allowances for the government employees, scholarship etc. From the time of partition till 1990, the people in these areas were jointly identified as a single unit with all the benefits accruing equally to Paharis, Gujjars, Bakerwals, Sheenas and Ladakhis, without any discrimination on the basis of name, caste or creed (Khan, 2008).

It was in the year 1991 that these communities were declared Scheduled Tribe on the basis of their culture, language, geographical location and poor living conditions, except the Paharis, by the Central government. It has been since then that the Pahari people intensified their demand for ST status, that the Gujjars, Bakerwals and Paharis who reside in the same areas, face equal hardships and disadvantages must be entitled to equal rights (Manhotra, 2016).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Various studies have been conducted to discuss and analyze the different dimensions of the tribal life in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, available relevant studies have been critically reviewed. Muzaffer Ali (2011) in his study described that the tribals of Jammu and Kashmir are still lagging behind than the general population of the state. Gul and Ganai (2016) explored in their study that despite the constitutional protection and awareness their level of education is very low, due to low rate of enrolment and high dropout rate at elementary and higher levels. Dar and Sarvanand (2015) discussed in their study the socio-economic and health status of scheduled tribe in Anantnag district and finds that Gujjars and Bakkerwals are living in a miserable conditions. The lack of infrastructures, inaccessibility to health institutions, nomadic tribal environment and inaccessibility and unaffordability to health care facilities are some of the main problems contributing to their poor health. Kavita Suri (2015) in her study analyzed the impact of armed conflict on the migratory practices of Gujjars and found that conflict has greatly affected the livelihood as the presence of militants in upper reaches compelled them to abandoned their annual migratory practices and they are forced to remain restricted to plain low lying areas. Azhar Ud Din (2015) in his study focused upon the socio-economic condition of Gujjars living in various districts of Kashmir region and concluded that their condition is very pathetic as compared to Gujjars of Jammu province. Javeed Bhat (2014) in his study discussed about the ethnic identity and life style of the Gujjar tribe of Jammu and Kashmir and stated that nomadic

and pastoral living pattern and migratory practices are being affected by harsh climatic conditions and political instability of the state. Javeed Bhat (2013) in another study mentioned that the reservation policy of the state has been driven by the vote bank politics. The criteria for reservation have always been controversial and debatable. This negligence on part of policy makers sowed the seeds of division at regional, linguistic, ethnic and communal lines which proved to be a tower of Babel in the State.

## THE GUJJARS

The Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir is living a miserable and pathetic life. They are lacking the basic facilities of food, shelter, health care, education etc. Most of the tribals are living in far flung remote areas, quite distant from the cities and towns and lack the accessibility to the basic amenities of life. Because of the nomadic character and seasonal migration along with their livestock, their life is totally dependent on their flocks as a means to their livelihood (Hussain, 1985). The regular movement from one place to another place keeps them untouched from the purview of development which compels them to live in abject poverty, illiteracy and backwardness. Apart from being entitled to all the basic human rights, they have been given certain special rights provided by the Constitution. The Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir has notified 12 such tribal communities as scheduled tribes and the Gujjars constitute 69 percent of the total ST population in the State (Suri, 2014).

The Gujjars, on the basis of their occupation and settlements in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, are classified as (i) cultivators (Muqami) who have settled in the villages on the slopes or valleys, (ii) The Gujjars who practice transhumance. Gujjars are divided into several "Gotras", "Kabilas" and "Deras". Each Kabila has its own Muqdam and a council of Jirgas (panchayat). The Gujjar's distinct identity continues to be identified mainly on the basis of their occupation and settlement. Despite their stay in Jammu and Kashmir for centuries together, they

maintain their distinct identity in terms of their language, customs and culture (Hari, 1998). The corpus of beliefs, rituals and ceremonies has been influenced by their environment and pastoral ways of life. The conservatism, backwardness, and belief in superstition and myths are the hallmark of the Gujjar's day-to-day life. They usually live in huts and tents at the high lands. On account of their migratory character they do not invest much on their housing. Their life is absolutely intolerable, particularly during the winter when icy winds, snow fall and rain are beyond imagination. The traditional profession of the Gujjars is to graze their cattle and supply its produce: milk, ghee etc. to the urban people. Their economy is, quite traditional and primitive, many of the Gujjars do not even own the flock (Khatana, 1942).

Gujjars are mostly illiterate due to the migratory character. They do not like to send their children to school on the plea that they would not take up their ancestral and traditional occupation of cattle rearing and other agricultural practices after being educated. They send their children with cattle for grazing in the jungles or to cut the grass. The state Government has opened up a number of mobile schools for them which move to high altitude and come down to plain with the movement of Gujjars. But due to the lack of effective supervision and control by the government authorities this scheme is ineffective. The people of this community do not favour girl education out of their sheer ignorance, age old social taboos, outdated thinking and backwardness (Baradwaj, 1994).

## THE PAHARIS

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The Pahari speaking people of Jammu and Kashmir are one of the ancient races, much more ancient than the Buddhist period in Kashmir. They belong to the Aryan race which had once invaded India . The Pahari speaking people are living in the areas of southern upper hills of Pirpanchal particularly from western Banihal to Muzaffarabad, Drawa and Nangaparbath adjoining areas. Literally, the word 'Pahari' refers to the people who are settled on the

mountain ranges of Jammu and Kashmir. According to Motilal Saqi, "The unique historical, linguistic, social and political characteristics has given a new meaning to the word Pahari, once we speak out the word, we refer to particular community of people whose mother tongue is Pahari and who are inhabiting in the Pirpanchal range from the middle areas from river Jehlum to river Chinab (Maini, 2006).

The Pahari are the people from diverse races, castes and religions whose distinct cultural heritage, life style and mother tongue has ascribed them a composite cultural identity. Amongst them are Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who have been co-habiting together from many decades. The commonly found are Sayed, Qureshi, Dhand, Sadan, Khakad, Ferozal, Dhomal, Jeral, Chib, Chadak, Manhas, Pathan, Turk, Dowi, Brahman and Khatri, Kashmiri etc. (Vaid.2004).These people have maintained their unique identity, because of the simplicity, interesting and sweet language, unique characteristics, beautiful physique, traditional dress, glorious and rich cultural heritage. There are also the Gujjar Bakerwal settlements in these hilly areas but Pahari speaking people are in majority, almost comprises of 57 percent who speak Pahari language (Shah, 2016). Despite some local lingual variations from the Badel to Karna hills, people have maintained a common identity and culture. Some of them are living in the villages falling near the Actual Line of Control where the life is very miserable and the economy of the area is based on agricultural, exclusively depending on the changing climate or locally made tools. The establishment of industries and business are not possible in these Pahari dominated areas due to unavailability of modern means of transport, electricity and other facilities.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

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1. To study the socio-economic status on the basis of caste, occupation and educational attainment of Gujjars and Paharis of Jammu and Kashmir

2. To compare the socio-economic and educational status of the Gujjars and Paharis of Jammu and Kashmir
3. To suggest the alleviative measures for the upliftment of Gujjars and Paharis of Jammu and Kashmir

100 respondents were selected from each of the district; that is 50 from the Gujjars and 50 for the Paharis accordingly.

### SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The population of the study includes all the Gujjars and Paharis of the Jammu and Kashmir in general and residents of four districts namely, Rajouri, Poonch, Kupwara and Shopian in particular, where the major chunk of people from both the communities are residing. Out of total population of Gujjars and Paharis in these four districts, only 400 respondents were selected through purposive sampling technique. In order to make the study more convenient and purposive, 200 respondents were approached from each of the community; the

### METHODOLOGY

The comparison is based on the lines of the socio-economic status through using an information schedule which includes the items related to identity, social, economic and educational indicators. The items in the information schedule were open and close ended. While as the house hold characteristics such as income, and economic status represents the shared house hold. Conducting research over primitive communities is very difficult. Hence it is necessary to use sophisticated methodology and care be taken right from the selection of tools and techniques for the data collection.

#### Data Analysis and Interpretation

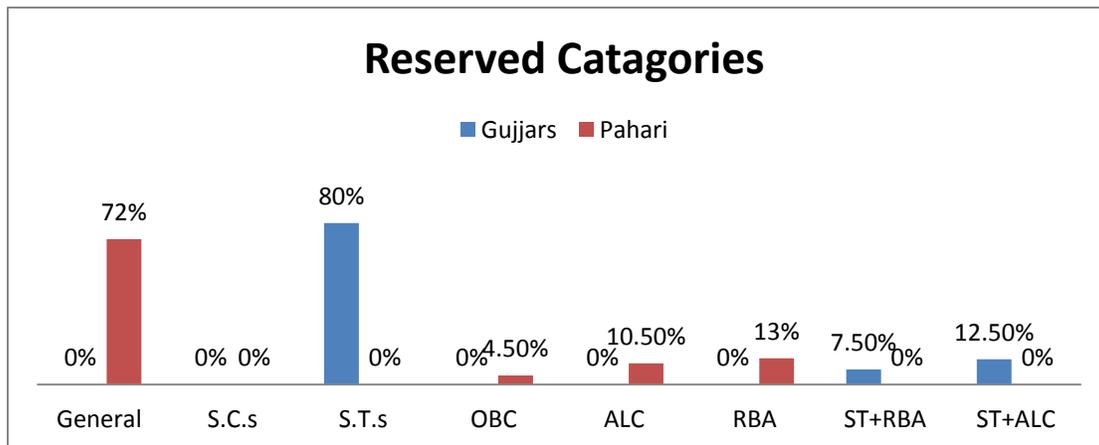


Fig. 1. Reserved Categories among Gujjars and Paharis

The above figure 1 illustrates that 100 percent of the Gujjars exclusively enjoy the Scheduled Tribe status, 7.5 percent and 12.5 percent are enjoying double reservation in the form of Resident of Backward Area (ST+RBA) and Actual Line of Control (ST+ALC) status respectively. While as, the researcher further noticed that 72 percent of the Paharis are from

General category, 4.5 percent belong to OBC, 10.5 percent fall under ALC and 13 percent are covered under RBA category.

The data shows that the reservation policy of Jammu and Kashmir is ambiguous and haphazard. The criteria for reservation have been adopted either on caste base or area base and /or on profession base.

While including these people in the list of reserved categories, no barrier has been put between millionaires and poor. These loopholes can be observed by the result shown in the above figure that a considerable proportion of population have been included in more than one reserved categories, so they are enjoying double, sometimes triple reservation benefits. On the other hand, creamy layer of the community identified as reserved categories is getting all the benefits at the cost of other poor people of the community. These poor

people are still languishing at the level on which they were decades ago. But unfortunately, the government is still promising some more reservations in the name of cast or language. The latest ongoing demand is the inclusion of the Pahari speaking people of the state in the list of Scheduled Tribe categories despite the fact that a good proportion among them are already included in OBC, ALC and RBA categories.

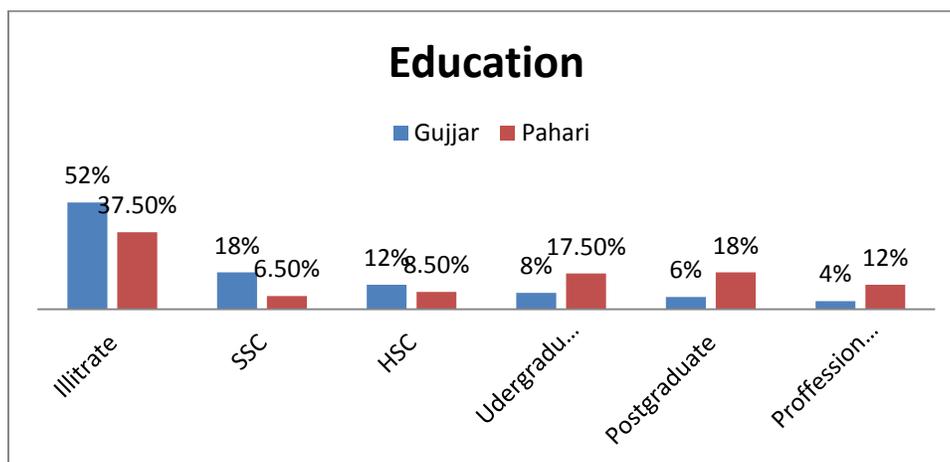


Fig. 2. Educational Status of Gujjars and Paharis

The figure 2 above shows that 52 percent of the Gujjars are still illiterate and rest literates got employment opportunity at the early stage of their education, so they do not prefer higher education. Whereas, the Paharis are very much found in abundance in higher education. The researcher found that 18 percent of the Paharis are studying in various higher educational institutions and 12 percent are pursuing the professional/technical education. The researcher further found that 18 percent of the Gujjars are studying at HSC level, 12 percent at SSC, 8 percent at under graduation, 6 percent at post graduation level and small proportion of 4 percent are pursuing professional/technical education. Whereas, in case of Paharis 37.5 percent were found illiterates, 6.5 percent in HSC and 17.5 are studying at undergraduate level.

The data reveals that there exists a considerable difference between the Gujjars and Paharis in terms of educational attainment. The proportion of the Gujjars in education is considerably low than the Paharis. There are several factors responsible for the low literacy rate among the Gujjars. A large number of Gujjars are still living nomadic and semi nomadic life, their nomadic character does not allow them to fully reap the benefits of education. They are very much negligent and ignorant in their approach towards the importance of education. They do not prefer to send their wards to school rather prefer to engage them with the livestock rearing. In addition to this, the migratory character of the Gujjars and Paharis is the biggest obstacle in their educational field. However, during field work, the researcher observed that the government has opened up a number of mobile schools which migrate to high altitudes during summer and come down to plains in

winter with them, but large number of schools were found defunct due to lack of basic infrastructure and dearth of adequate staff. Gradually, the Gujjars living in the remote areas have realized the importance of reservation in educational institutions, recruitment and promotions. Due to reserved quota, they get government employment as early as in intermediate stage or at undergraduate level so a least proportion of Gujjars were found in higher education.

While as, the literacy rate among the Paharis is found better than the Gujjars because the Pahari population is not much dispersed as the Gujjars and thus possess adequate educational facilities. Due to fewer employment opportunities at the intermediate or at undergraduate level, they are largely found in higher education.

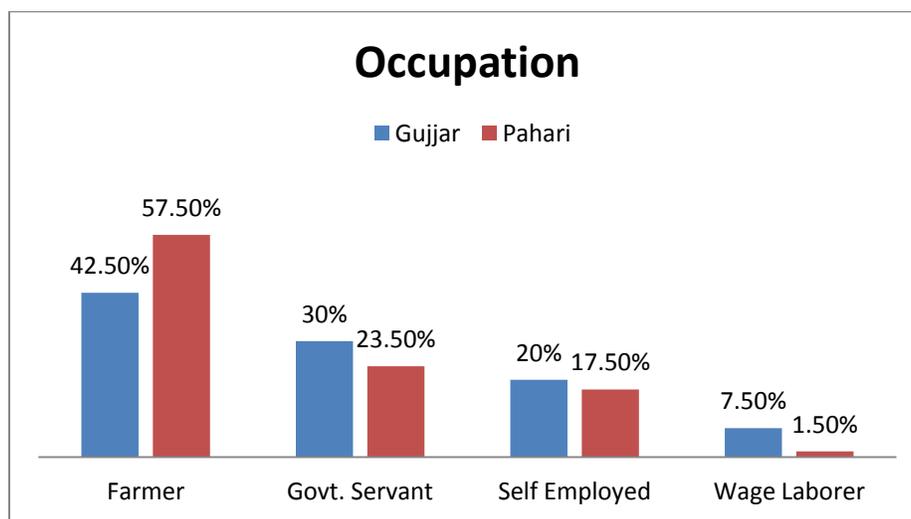


Fig. 3. Occupation of Gujjars and Paharis

The figure 3 shows that 42.5 percent of Gujjars are associated with cultivation of land. And due to reserved quota, 30 percent are government employees, 20 percent are self employed and 7.5 percent are laborers doing work here and there. Whereas, the Paharis are the land owners from the ancient period, the researcher observed that 57.5 percent of the Paharis are farmers and 23.5 percent are the government employees who have migrated from far off remote areas to cities and towns of the state. It was further noticed that 17.5 percent of the Paharis are engaged in trade and a least proportion of about 1.5 percent are working as laborers.

Since ages, the nomadic Gujjars have been practicing the cattle rearing and are always eager to add more to their livestock but now many of Gujjars

have left their nomadic profession because their economy is determined by the availability and utilization of natural pastures. It was noticed that at the upper hills, number of Gujjars traditional dhokas (grazing areas) in Keran, Kupwara, Bandipora, Karna, Zojila, Poonch, Rajouri, Doda and many other places are restricted for grazing by the security forces. And the other reason is that due to reservation benefit they got sedentarised and migrated to urban areas where they buy land for cultivation and adopted other means to earn their livelihood.

The researcher further observed that the ratio of the Gujjars in employment are somehow more than that of the Paharis. This significant difference is the result of the scheduled tribe status of Gujjars from 1991, which provide them reserved quota in admission in educational institutions,

employment and in promotions. They get assistance and special subsidy from Scheduled Caste Development Corporation in order to run their small scale business establishments, and it was noticed that a good proportion of population from Gujjars had got edge from self employment schemes of the government for running their own business establishments at local level. Whereas the Paharis remain all along busy in cultivating their own land

farms. Having fewer chances of employment opportunities at early stage of education, they are somehow compelled to go for higher education and develop the competence for government employment but since their demand of scheduled tribe status, government had launched several schemes specially focused for the development of these Pahari people.

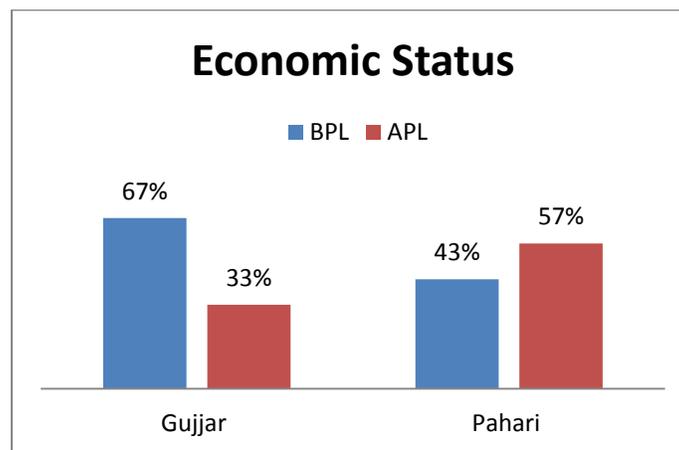


Fig. 4. Economic Status of Gujjars and Paharis

The figure 4 shows that 67 percent of the Gujjars and 43 percent of the Paharis live under below poverty line (BPL). The data reveals that there is a significant difference between the Gujjars and Paharis on the measure of socio-economic status. The economic status of the Gujjars is lower as compared to Paharis because the economy of Gujjar

people is based on cattle rearing and a major chunk of population do manual labor in towns and cities. Some of the Gujjars engage in milk trade but not on a large scale. Whereas, the Pahari speaking people are economically sound than the Gujjars. They possess land for farming and a major proportion of population is engaged in trade and business.

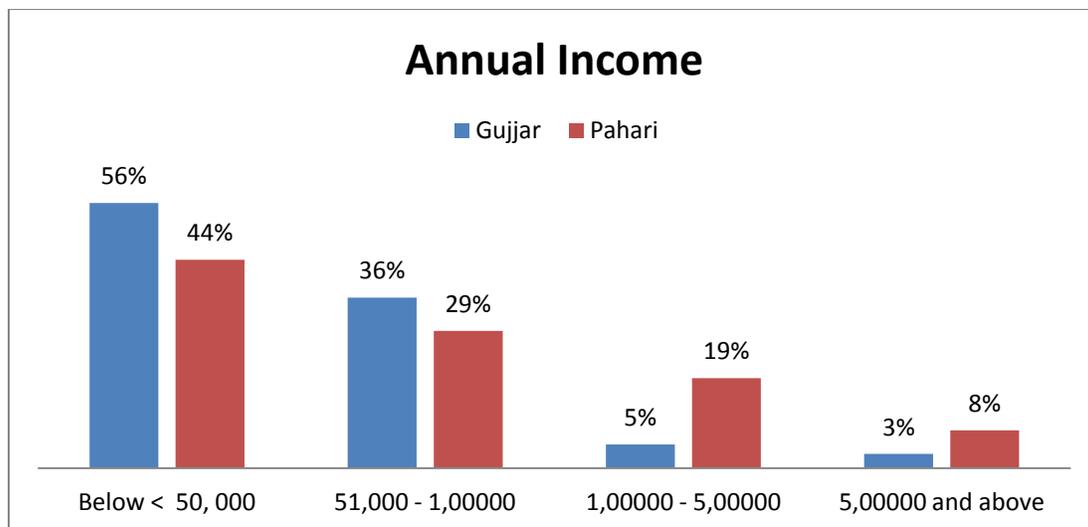


Fig. 5. Annual Income of Gujjars and Paharis

The figure 5 shows that 56% of the Gujjars have annual income below 50,000 rupees. Whereas 44 percent of the Paharis have annual income under this range, 36 percent of the Gujjars were found to be falling under the annual income range of 51,000 to 1,00,000. Whereas in case of Paharis, 29 percent were found to be falling under this range. A least proportion of 5 percent among Gujjars were found to have annual income in the range of 1,00,000 to 5,00,000, while as 19 percent of the Paharis were found under this range. A very small proportion of about 3 percent Gujjars have annual income range of 5,00,000 and above. Whereas, in case of Paharis about 8 percent fall under this range.

The data reveals that there exists a considerable difference between Gujjars and Paharis in terms of annual income. It was noticed that the annual income range of the Gujjars is considerably less than that of the Paharis because the nomadic fragile economy of the Gujjars does not add much to their annual income whereas the Paharis, who are no doubt well off than the Gujjars, are engaged in trade and business and thus have more annual income than the Gujjars.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident from the factual information collected by the researcher by administering an information

schedule to the people from both the communities that the socio-economic status of both the communities is not at par with other groups, and specifically the Gujjars, who live in less concentrated and remote areas than the Paharis, are worst affected. Their nomadic character somehow confined them with their primitive jobs like cattle rearing, selling charcoal made from forest residues etc. These nomadic Gujjars have been given Scheduled Tribe status in 1991, but it is evident that such ameliorative measures had not reached to the needy and deserving people i.e. a creamy layer class got developed who have migrated from their ancestral villages and are living in the main cities and towns of the state. They left behind their community in the shackles of nomadism and backwardness. Now, there is a competition within the community between the people who got edge through reservation and are posted at the prime positions in the state and the people who are yet living at the hillocks and remote and backward areas of the state. This sort of discrimination got developed because of the politics with the reservation policy of the state. These loopholes were observed by the result of data, which shows that a large proportion of population have been included in more than one reserved categories. 7.5 percent and 12.5 percent of the Gujjars enjoy double reservation benefit in the name of Resident of Backward Area (ST+RBA) and Actual Line of Control (ST+ALC) status respectively.

Furthermore, while making comparison between the Gujjars and Paharis, the data showed certain significant results, the educational status of the Gujjars is comparatively low as compared to Paharis as their nomadic character had not allowed them to fully reap the benefits of education.

Thus it can be concluded that people from both the communities are not much stable economically as they are living in the remote far flung areas of the state. They are facing equal hardships in their day to day life, but specifically Gujjars are worst sufferers. Therefore some ameliorative measures are definitely needed to alleviate their socio-economic position but it can be ascertained that reservation had not proved to be a tool for this alleviation. Instead it had divided society and creamy layer of the community is taking all the benefits. So it is right time to took introspection of the reservation policy and instead launch some reformative measures which will really help the needy and deserving. The following suggestions can be a way forward for the policy makers drafting the welfare measures for alleviating the weaker section of the society.

- Government should do something seriously to preserve the culture of the communities feeling discriminated and there must be an emphasis on conducting studies/research and documenting their practices and life pattern.
- Government should definitely look into the upliftment of backward sections of the society seriously. However granting a privilege forever is not an apt solution to the problem. One time package for education, livelihood, or holistic welfare of such groups can be a step forward.
- The Gujjars as well as Pahari community is devoid of adequate socio-economic and educational development. Therefore, a strong socio-anthropological insight is badly needed to look into the culture and life pattern, identity crisis and overall pressing issues of the both the communities.
- Both the communities are living in congruent

geographical conditions and have adopted similar life styles. Both the communities either lives in remote, far flung and inaccessible hilly areas mainly in the Pir Pahchal region or their basties (habitations) are located around LOC. So they face similar problems like economic backwardness. Therefore, both the communities need equal ameliorative measures.

- The Paharis have not yet been given a proper definition by the planning department of Jammu and Kashmir State and no proper survey has been made of their economic vulnerability. So there is an urgent need for conducting a proper socio-economic survey so that sustainable development of all sections of the society can take place.

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